

Calling on Managers: Managers can make a Marvelous Difference in Retaining New Nurses...

Nurses who express satisfaction with their jobs often cite their relationship with their managers as the reason for their longevity. With retention as a front burner issue, skilled, visible managers are more important now than ever before. Here are five recommendations a manager can implement to keep that new nurse a satisfied, retained nurse!

1. Protection from unrealistic expectations: while you don't want or need to coddle new nurses, protecting them from unrealistic demands and expectations beyond their capabilities, is a wise strategy to pursue. With a severe shortage of nurses, your new nurse may get swept up in the tidal wave of tasks, despite your best efforts. Remind your senior nurses, repeatedly, that their new colleagues, need to be broken in gradually; if they enter choppy waters before knowing how to swim properly, extreme overwhelm and low self-esteem can replace job satisfaction.

2. Communication-skills training: horror stories abound of new nurses being treated badly by their senior counterparts; oftentimes, verbal abuse is so systemic and entrenched that it is not addressed as a problem or crisis on the unit; it is considered normal. Also, it is not uncommon to hear a manager say, in response to conflicts and related problems, "you are all adults; you should be able to work it out on your own". While that may sound like a reasonable expectation, it is generally more a myth than a reality. If you assess that verbal abuse is systemic on your unit, take some action. Remember many new nurses don't feel like they have the right, the skills or the allies to address or shrug off poor treatment. This type of treatment, particularly if it is chronic, may encourage their departure sooner than you want or expect.

3. Visibility and accessibility: despite a manager's plate being full to overflowing with all sorts of responsibilities, being present and accessible to your new nurses is extremely important. It is a way to see first hand, how the adjustment to life on the unit is going; it is also a way to address any problems that come up. While overseeing the adjustment of a new nurse may not feel like a priority, it may be a real pay-off when that new nurse learns her job well and can function independently.

4. Address and document inappropriate behavior: a change in response should be considered if your reaction regarding rude and inappropriate behavior of a senior nurse is, "Oh, that is just how she is." Managers, use your power to address and document inappropriate behavior. Communicating your concerns directly to experienced nurses, along with a discussion of alternatives ways of behaving, is a constructive use of your role and authority. Also, alert your experienced nurses that consequences will accompany abusive behavior.

5. No-abuse policy: finally, after new skills are in place, implement a no-abuse policy on the unit. Use staff meetings to get input from nurses to construct standards for effective communication, record the standards and have them easily accessible to staff as reminders to use. As a manager, you can model those skills and gently remind staff to use them if and when the team lapses into more dysfunctional ways of interacting. That is a good way to create a cultural norm that supports skilled, respectful communication.

A manager's role in helping his or her team, to be a welcoming, respectful place for new nurses should not be underestimated. Taking the time with a new nurse gives you an important opportunity to contribute to that nurse's healthy integration onto the team. And, with a positive start, you may be instrumental in ensuring a nurse's retention, a role you absolutely want to play.

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